How to Protect Yourself

A biological attack is the deliberate release of germs or other biological substances that can make you sick. Many agents must be inhaled, enter through a cut in the skin or be eaten to make you sick. Some biological agents, such as anthrax, do not cause contagious diseases. Others, like the smallpox virus, can result in diseases you can catch from other people.

If there is a Biological Threat

Unlike an explosion, a biological attack may or may not be immediately obvious. While it is possible that you will see signs of a biological attack, as was sometimes the case with the anthrax mailings, it is perhaps more likely that local health care workers will report a pattern of unusual illness or there will be a wave of sick people seeking emergency medical attention. You will probably learn of the danger through an emergency radio or TV broadcast, or some other signal used in your community. You might get a telephone call or emergency response workers may come to your door

In the event of a biological attack, public health officials may not immediately be able to provide information on what you should do. It will take time to determine exactly what the illness is, how it should be treated, and who is in danger. However, you should watch TV, listen to the radio, or check the Internet for official news including the following:

- Are you in the group or area authorities consider in danger?
- What are the signs and symptoms of the disease?
- Are medications or vaccines being distributed?
- Where? Who should get them?
- Where should you seek emergency medical care if you become sick?

<u>During a declared biological emergency:</u>

- 1. If a family member becomes sick, it is important to be suspicious.
- 2. Do not assume, however, that you should go to a hospital emergency room or that any illness is the result of the biological attack. Symptoms of many common illnesses may overlap.
- 3. Use common sense, practice good hygiene and cleanliness to avoid spreading germs, and seek medical advice.
- 4. Consider if you are in the group or area authorities believe to be in danger.
- 5. If your symptoms match those described and you are in the group considered at risk, immediately seek emergency medical attention.

If you are potentially exposed:

- 1. Follow instructions of doctors and other public health officials.
- 2. If the disease is contagious expect to receive medical evaluation and treatment. You may be advised to stay away from others or even deliberately quarantined.
- 3. For non-contagious diseases, expect to receive medical evaluation and treatment.

If you become aware of an unusual and suspicious substance nearby:

- 1. Quickly get away.
- 2. Protect yourself. Cover your mouth and nose with layers of fabric that can filter the air but still allow breathing. Examples include two to three layers of cotton such as a t-shirt, handkerchief or towel. Otherwise, several layers of tissue or paper towels may help.

- 3. Wash with soap and water.
- 4. Contact authorities.
- 5. Watch TV, listen to the radio, or check the Internet for official news and information including what the signs and symptoms of the disease are, if medications or vaccinations are being distributed and where you should seek medical attention if you become sick.
- 6. If you become sick seek emergency medical attention.

Symptoms

If a family member develops any of the symptoms below, keep them separated from others if possible, practice good hygiene and cleanliness to avoid spreading germs, and seek medical advice.

- A temperature of more than 100 degrees
- Nausea and vomiting
- Stomachache
- Diarrhea
- Pale or flushed face
- Headache
- Cough
- Earache
- Thick discharge from nose
- Sore throat
- Rash or infection of the skin
- Red or pink eyes
- Loss of appetite
- Loss of energy or decreases in activity

Hygiene

If someone is sick, you should practice good hygiene and cleanliness to avoid spreading germs.

- Wash your hands with soap and water frequently.
- Do not share food or utensils.
- Cover your mouth and nose when coughing or sneezing.
- Consider having the sick person wear a face mask to avoid spreading germs.
- Plan to share health-related information with others, especially those who may need help understanding the situation and what specific actions to take.

Creating a Barrier

A biological attack is the deliberate release of germs or other substances that can make you sick. Many agents must be inhaled, absorbed through cuts in the skin or eaten to make you sick. Some biological agents, such as anthrax do not cause diseases that are contagious. Others, like the smallpox virus, can result in illnesses you can catch from other people. Many of these agents can only hurt you if they get into your body, so think about creating a barrier between yourself and any contamination.

For more information on potential biological weapons, visit Centers for Disease Control.

Emergency Information

Unlike an explosion, a biological attack may not be immediately obvious. While it is possible that you will see signs of a biological attack, as was sometimes the case with the anthrax mailings, it is perhaps more likely that local health care workers will report a pattern of unusual illness or there will be a wave of sick people seeking emergency medical attention. You will probably learn of the danger through an emergency radio or TV

broadcast. You might get a telephone call or emergency response workers may come to your door. To find out contact your local American Red Cross office what kind of emergency signal is used in your communit

For more information, visit the American Red Cross website.

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- Are you in the group or area authorities considered in danger?
- What are the signs and symptoms of the disease?
- Are medications or vaccines being distributed? Where? Who should get them?
- Where should you seek emergency medical care if you become sick?

Cover Your Nose and Mouth

Be prepared to improvise with what you have on hand to protect your nose, mouth, eyes and cuts in your skin. Anything that fits snugly over your nose and mouth, including any dense-weave cotton material, can help filter contaminants in an emergency. It is very important that most of the air you breathe comes through the mask or cloth, not around it. Do whatever you can to make the best fit possible for children. There are also a variety of face masks readily available in hardware stores that are rated based on how small a particle they can filter in an industrial setting. Simple cloth face masks can filter some of the airborne "junk" or germs you might breathe into your body, but will probably not protect you from chemical gases. Still, something over your nose and mouth in an emergency is better than nothing

Antibiotics

While antibiotics are often an appropriate treatment for the diseases associated with biological weapons, the specific drug must match the illness to be effective. One antibiotic, for example, may be appropriate for treating anthrax exposure, but is inappropriate for treating smallpox. All antibiotics can cause side effects including serious reactions. Plan to speak with your health care provider in advance about what makes sense for your family.

Use Common Sense

At the time of a declared biological emergency, if a family member becomes sick, it is important to be suspicious. Do not automatically assume, however, that you should go to an emergency room or that any illness is the result of the biological attack. Symptoms of many common illnesses may overlap. Use common sense, practice good hygiene and cleanliness to avoid spreading germs, and seek medical advice.

- Stay healthy. Eat well. Get plenty of rest.
- Use common sense to determine if there is immediate danger.
- Wash your hands with soap and water frequently.
- In a declared biological emergency or developing epidemic, there may be reason to stay away from crowds where others may be infected.
- There may be times when you would want to consider wearing a face mask to reduce spreading germs
 if you yourself are sick, or to avoid coming in contact with contagious germs if others around you are
 sick.